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## THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY is a training monastery and retreat centre following the Sōtō Zen Buddhist tradition. The Priory is affiliated with Shasta Abbey, whose Spiritual Director and Abbess is Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, O.B.C. Shasta Abbey, the headquarters of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives of the Sōtō Zen Church, is located in Mt. Shasta, California. The monks of Throssel Hole Priory are disciples of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and follow her teaching.

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THE JOURNAL OF THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY is published as a service to all who are seriously interested in the practice of Buddhism. Through the pages of the Journal, members and friends of the Priory are able to share their understanding and experience of Zen training; we welcome and encourage letters from our readers. Opinions expressed in each article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Abbot, Throssel Hole Priory, or the Editor. The Journal is published quarterly: a year's subscription is £4.25.

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## To Our Readers

Words are meant to convey thought; and the purpose of language is to get an idea as exactly as possible out of one mind and into another. That is the ideal, but in practice words are often used carelessly. This, together with emotionalism, personal opinions and lack of attention, causes the passage of a thought from one mind to another to be largely a hit-or-miss affair. Trying to convey spiritual truths in words is more complicated still. To express fully the certainty of Zen is beyond the capacity of speech; the *face-to-face Transmission outside of the scriptures* is a matter of direct personal experience which words cannot hope to define. But the Buddhas and Ancestors use all possible means to teach others and this includes the imprecise instrument called human language. They use words to suggest the Truth and so point us in the right direction. After his enlightenment Shakyamuni Buddha was tempted to remain silent and not pass on the teaching, but he soon realised this showed a lack of compassion. Later, the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism use vast panorama of similes and brilliant images to describe the Buddha Dharma and enlightenment; this is to reach many beings as possible and help them wake up and discover the Truth for themselves. These scriptures are excellent examples of the use of skilful means in proclaiming the Buddha's teaching.

Samsara is Nirvana, because there is, when viewed from the ultimate nature of the Dharmakaya, nothing going out of nor coming into existence.....The essence of all things is in truth free from attachment, attributes and desires; therefore, they are pure, and, as they are pure, we know that what is the essence of birth and death that is the essence of Nirvana, and that what is the essence of Nirvana that is the essence of birth and death.<sup>1</sup>

This essence is the Cosmic Buddha, or Vairocana Buddha, the Dharmakaya (Dharma Body of the Buddha). Keizan Zenji calls it the Lord of the House. Shakyamuni also refers to it — *Monks, there is an unborn, uncreated, undying, indestructible...* [Verses of Uplift, VIII, 3].

It is the ultimate reality, the fundamental source of all existence; although inexpressible in words it constantly manifests itself in and through all things. To personify the Dharma by giving It a name is *not* to postulate a personal deity or creator-god. The Dharmakaya is not a being yet is not not a being; it is beyond all duality. The use of these and similar terms is a natural human response to experiencing the infinite and compassionate heart of Buddha. They express gratitude and respect. To *know* the "Lord of the House" gives this phrase a precise reference in one's own experience; but to train and *not yet know* the "Lord of the House" does not make this phrase meaningless — on the contrary, the awakening and growth of faith illuminates it from within.

\* \* \*

#### Note

1. From the Vicesacinta-Brahma-Pariprccha sutra as quoted in Lucien Stryk ed., *World of the Buddha* (New York: Anchor books - Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1969), p. 270.

\* \* \*

# Notes on Zazen Practice

Rev. Master Kyogen Carlson, O.B.C.

(This article is reprinted, with minor changes, from the *Journal of Shasta Abbey*, January-February 1982. Trainees who have been sitting for a while and wish to deepen their practice will find it particularly helpful.)

Over several years of answering questions from those newly engaged in meditation practice I have noticed several questions that are common in the experience of beginners that I would like to share with you.

People sometimes tell me they have been sitting for several years but can only manage the full-lotus posture for a short time and that even the half-lotus often becomes too much to bear after thirty or forty minutes. They will go on to describe pitched battles with the ego as the time to sit approaches in which every excuse imaginable *not* to sit presents itself. They then ask for some advice on overcoming the physical and mental resistance they are experiencing. This is a very clear example of pushing oneself too hard in order to fit the *ideal* form of Zazen practice. No matter what posture you use, if this description sounds at all like you, please be more gentle with yourself. Turning the flow of compassion within begins with treating your own body with respect and care. It is neither necessary nor wise to strain to maintain any posture, and signs that you are pushing too hard should not be ignored. It is of course good to make an effort to improve one's ability to sit, but Zazen should never become an endurance test. If we approach Zazen with gentle determination and a bright mind, we will look forward to sitting with eagerness rather than dread.

and Zazen will remain a practice that can enrich us all the years of our lives. I recommend sitting for as long as it is comfortable in a given posture then making the effort to sit for two or three minutes more. Thereafter, change position or do *kinhin*<sup>1</sup> if necessary. Meditation done well for five or ten minutes is far superior to hours of self-torture. So please do not be in a hurry to progress physically because in many ways this defeats the deeper purpose of Zazen. The posture should be so still, centred and *comfortable* that the mind is alert and completely relaxed.

I remember how surprised I was to discover that the lotus postures are recommended precisely for their comfort, and also because the postures are a physical expression of what we are trying to achieve in meditation. Sitting in full or half-lotus locks the hips in a position that holds the back naturally erect, positioning the head and shoulders directly over the hips; this helps us become physically centred. This is also a posture of great awareness like the one assumed when "sitting on the edge of the chair" at the climax of a film. In Zazen this principle is applied in reverse; by holding ourselves erect, we very easily remain alert. Further advantages are that the triangular formation of the knees along with the locking of the hips holds the body stable front to back and side to side with no distracting muscular effort. This helps us to remain very, very still. Also, since we are not leaning against any surface our circulation is not impeded and there is no need to fidget. In this attitude of alert, centred, still comfort we find the essence of meditation to which tortured endurance bears no resemblance. So, although there is good reason to want to develop the ability to use the cross-legged postures well, straining to do so defeats their purpose and discourages meditation practice. It is better to sit comfortably and regularly on a chair or kneeling (which lack only the stability of cross-legged sitting) and gradually work into a lotus position when and if it feels right.

Another question that often arises is how to handle

distracting thoughts, emotions, memories and such. People vary tremendously in their experience with this depending upon their personalities and character. One person may be appalled to discover the first time he sits that his thoughts rampage through his mind like a runaway train. Another may find sitting fairly easy and pleasant at first, but a little later discover whatever emotion is uppermost in his life at that time becomes intensified and almost unbearable during meditation.

To take the case of the runaway thoughts as an example, people will describe monumental battles with their thoughts. While we should not let ourselves be carried away by distracting thoughts, sometimes called *monkey mind*, we must accept them gently, compassionately and wholeheartedly. We should embrace our own tendency towards monkey mind patiently as one would a small child. There is nothing wrong in having an active mind, only if we make it the centre of our being. The stillness of meditation lies beneath prattling thoughts, not beyond and separate from them. People often make the mistake when sitting in thinking they have to somehow start over, or "make up for it," when they realise that their minds have been wandering. However, the moment we recognise the wandering mind we are already meditating. There is nothing else to do. By gently accepting monkey mind it is conquered, and the prattling of thoughts will gently subside by itself.

People have told me that when distracting thoughts seem extra persistent, they will sometimes break the train of thought by a process something like mentally "blinking." I think it can occasionally be good to do this if it is used to help grasp the will, but be extremely careful of making a practice of repressing thoughts. At one time in my training I became very good at repressing thought altogether. Then one day during a meal, I suddenly lost the right side of my vision. Everything to the right of a plane extending directly out from my nose simply vanished. It was a very disturbing several minutes that brought a clear message to relax my practice.

When distracting thoughts persist, a good way to handle them is to count the breaths. This is done by counting each breath as you exhale, breathing slowly and deeply, but naturally.<sup>2</sup> When you get to ten start again at one. It helps to know there is a difference between awareness or consciousness and thought. By being aware of our breathing we become aware that our consciousness goes far deeper than the thinking process. As we focus our awareness on the still depths beneath thought, the thoughts subside by themselves because we stop investing energy in them. This is learning to "live" in a place deeper than our own heads. When this happens we feel a settling of body and mind, a relaxation into Zazen. As it continues we then stop counting the breath and simply watch each breath come in and go out without counting. As the relaxation becomes complete, we let go of watching the breath and concentrate on just sitting. From here meditation can take many forms, some extraordinarily deep, some ecstatic, some less deep but very meaningful. It is important not to expect anything, but rather simply to prepare ourselves for whatever experience is to be given. After all, it is a gift and not something that can be achieved or taken by force.

As with distracting thoughts, so it is with any other problem that arises during meditation whether it is intense emotion, feelings of inadequacy, resistance to the teaching, or daydreaming. Since meditation is a process of getting beyond self, all the ways in which we cling to self stand out in sharp contrast as we progress. It can help to realise that increased awareness of our own attachments is a sign of progress if we are willing to learn from it. But always it is through gentle acceptance of our limitations that we deepen our awareness of the Buddha Nature, since that within ourselves which recognises and accepts these limitations is our own Buddha Nature.

Over the centuries Buddhist sages have observed themselves from the perspective of meditation. Buddhist doctrine has arisen from this observation and

has much to offer that can help us understand our own experiences. This doctrine teaches that a sentient being is composed of five *skandhas*, arranged in successive layers. They are: *form*, which is the physical body; *sensation*, physical and emotional feelings; *thought*, simply the level of thinking; *activity*, which means drive or volition; and finally *consciousness* itself. This teaching also says that these five are subject to change, and so have no permanent separate self-nature. They are therefore *sūnya*, or empty. But this emptiness also means that they are fundamentally pure, for they are neither separate from nor in any way impede the Buddha Nature.

From this teaching I have come to view the five *skandhas* as the source of five delusions of self. The first is the belief that "I am my body." Excessive concern for health or beauty or body-building are examples of this. The second is "I am my feelings." The Romantic Age was rife with this, and some schools of psychological therapy appear to indulge it also. Third is "I am my thoughts." Descartes formulated the classic expression of this<sup>3</sup> during the Age of Reason, and it seems to be the most pervasive of these delusion in the West. The fourth comes out as "I am what I do." This is very common among highly motivated, career-orientated people. "I am a doctor, lawyer, nurse, mother, father, sage." Also, "I am my drive to become wealthy, successful, famous..." And finally, the most subtle and dangerous of all, "I am my consciousness." It is here that the mistake is made of turning the religious quest itself into a possession of self. How this is to be avoided is difficult to describe but I will give it a shot later on.

The practice of meditation is learning to "live" in the stillness beneath all change, which is the True Centre, or the point at which "we" and "Cosmic Buddha" intersect. To do this is to express Buddha Nature. The case of the man who finds his thoughts running away from him during sitting is a case of *living in one's head* or having the delusion "I am my thoughts."

in many ways this is the easiest to get a handle on quickly because it's easy to recognise that thoughts are getting in the way. The second case, that of having emotions linger and intensify while sitting, is an example of living in the realm of sensation. Since people are a mixture of all five delusions of self, all come up at one point or another, but these two come up first and are the most common. The others come up later. The clue to how to deal with these distractions is found in the teaching that they are pure, and not separate from the Buddha Nature in any way. The first thing one is taught when starting to sit is to not try to think, do not try not to think; simply let things come and go without becoming involved in them. What a truly wise and deep teaching this is becomes clear in time in that it applies to every one of the five delusions of self. But it is always just gentle acceptance and letting go that get us beyond this clinging to self, just as it is with the first distracting thoughts that obscure meditation.

Another but similar question people have has to do with glimpses of an exquisite state of mind and realisations that occur during meditation. They often complain that as soon as this exquisite state of mind arises and is recognised, it suddenly recedes further than ever. What is usually happening is that the desire to know this exquisiteness leads to trying to catch it with the mind, or to cling to the sensation of it. But like water in the hand, it vanishes as the fingers close upon it. Experiences like these are part of the consciousness that lies beneath thought and feeling and therefore cannot be caught and held. It does no good to worry about them, or to chase after them. We can only concentrate on our just sitting and meditation in daily life. When such experiences come, let them come, and when they go, let them go, just like thoughts in Zazen. Our part in this is the just sitting. The Buddha Mind will manifest naturally, but will not respond to our demands.

For many years I wondered why it was that consciousness should be included in the five skandhas

that are subject to change and therefore empty. Consciousness is our deepest awareness, but it does change over time. It is through consciousness that we glimpse and come to know the Buddha, but it is by just sitting that we allow this door to open. We cannot cling to these experiences any more than we can cling to our first taste of fresh spring water. The more we experience and the more we learn, the greater becomes the danger of clinging to those things as possessions of self. When this happens our own experience can become the "Buddha that gets in the way." They become part of our delusion of self and we have to learn to get beyond them in order to continue progress on the spiritual path. Like the other skandhas, however, consciousness is pure and fundamentally part of the Buddha Nature. When we just sit and let go of our clinging to consciousness, the mind of meditation arises again and new experiences are possible. What is more, our past experiences are again seen as valuable Dharma instead of possessions of self. It is an endless source of wonder to me that the meditation practice we learn in the very beginning of letting things come and go without clinging is all we really need all along our path in training. It is just as Dōgen says in *Zazen Rules*:

This type of Zazen is not something that is done in stages of meditation. It is simply the lawful gateway to carefree peace.<sup>4</sup>

These questions describe some of the most commonly occurring problems in Zazen. Readers are invited to ask questions concerning their meditation. Very often in just writing down our questions we gain a tremendous insight into them, and then again the new perspective we gain by seeing things from another's experience can be exactly what we need to help us in our practice.

\* \* \*

## Notes

1. See *Zen Meditation* (Shasta Abbey Press), pp. 43-44.
2. At the start of a meditation period it is helpful to follow the energy of the first two or three breaths up the spine and down the front of the body as described in *Zen Meditation*, pp. 7-10. Please note you should only circulate the breath two or three times at the start of a meditation period and then continue "just sitting." - ed.
3. "Cogito ergo sum" or "I think, therefore I am."
4. Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life* (Dharma Publishing, 1976), p. 288; also *Zen Meditation*, p. 5.

\* \* \*

In either the east or west one can have the same practice and enlightenment. Try to bring the Buddhist Dharma and Way of the Patriarchs as close to your body and mind as possible. Then your life will be full of joy, hope, and determination.

Start from this moment, from this day, from this year, from this life — this is your task. Take the life of the Buddha Dharma and concentrate on it. This is the meaning of not wasting your life.

*Dōgen Zenji: Shōbōgenzō*

## GUEST DEPARTMENT NEWS

*Retreats:* Our full schedule of retreats continues to be well supported. Introductory retreats are usually booked up weeks in advance and people are advised to send in applications early to avoid disappointment. Retreats are very important occasions, not only for those who attend and benefit from them but also for the monastic community. They provide an excellent opportunity to share our understanding and explain the Buddha's teaching to others; especially to those who may be hearing it for the first time.

The *journey to the monastery* is a serious matter and can have a revolutionary impact upon a person's life. It can turn despair into hope; and by exposing the murk of ignorance to the clear light of the Dharma begin the task of liberating the self from suffering. It is therefore essential to approach a retreat or longer stay at the monastery with a sincere and respectful attitude.

Introductory retreats begin promptly at 5.30 pm with the first class. All those coming to the retreat *must* arrive by 5.00 pm at the latest. This is most important as latecomers cause extra work and valuable time is wasted before the retreat can get going; it is also inconsiderate to keep those who have arrived early waiting. All other retreats and sesshins begin with dinner at 6 pm on the first day, unless stated otherwise. Everyone is expected to arrive well in time for this. The Guestmaster may at his discretion relax this rule under *exceptional* circumstances. But please do not ask him to do so unless it is absolutely necessary. Coming to the monastery is an opportunity to train together as a Sangha. An important part of this training is to organize one's schedule so as to arrive on time.

*Suitable clothing for meditation and ceremonies:* In like manner, it is important to wear appropriate clothing when at the monastery. Regular congregation members are strongly urged to make and wear the approved meditation outfit recommended for lay trainees. Please see page 15 for a description and further details. Track suits, sweat pants and other athletic gear are not suitable for the meditation hall. However, new people who attend introductory retreats will still be allowed to wear this kind of clothing if it is not brightly coloured or heavily patterned.

For ceremonies, men are advised to wear either a meditation suit, dark suit, or jacket and trousers. Women should wear a meditation suit or a plain dark-coloured dress or kaftan; a plain sweater/blouse and full-length skirt is also suitable.

Please understand this is not to try and force a particular style of dress on people or interfere unreasonably in matters of personal taste. But there is a spiritual dimension to this area which is often overlooked. The correct attitude of mind and its outward expression must always be considered. A ceremony is an offering, and taking the trouble to dress respectfully and smartly becomes a part of this offering, and one's participation is thus greatly enriched. It is not just a question of putting on a show; it is a direct expression of respect for oneself and others; a compassionate act. Monks wear white robes and koromos at ceremonies to show their gratitude to the Buddhas and Ancestors. Lay members of the congregation can do the same by making an extra effort to be smartly dressed at ceremonies and to wear appropriate clothing for meditation. The Zendō is the heart of the monastery and it is a great privilege to be able to meditate there with like-minded people. This privilege should not be taken lightly.

*Meditation groups:* The number of meditation groups around the country who look to Throssel Hole Priory for spiritual guidance and support is slowly growing. Groups are firmly established in Newcastle-upon-Tyne,

Lancaster, Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds, Southsea, Hull, Chesterfield, Cirencester, Salisbury, Stoke-on-Trent, Buckingham, Bournemouth; and also in Dublin. The groups usually meet once a week for Zazen, scripture reading, and perhaps a taped lecture.

Also interested in meditating regularly with others are individual congregation members living in London, Shrewsbury, Northallerton, Durham and Manchester; also in Stirling, Castle Douglas, Tain, and Glenfinnen; and in Aberystwyth and Bangor; there are also enthusiastic members in Germany and Holland.

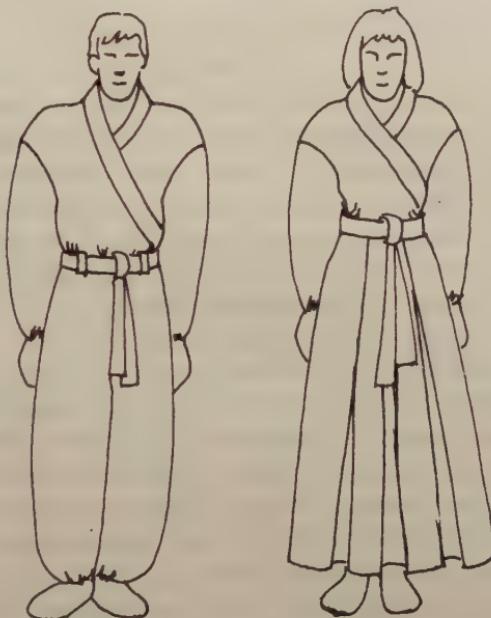
For information on meditation groups, or if you would like your name added to the list of those who are interested in sitting regularly with other people, please write to the Guestmaster.

*Other news:* The autumn Jūkai sesshin (October 2 - 8) is filling up steadily. Those who are thinking of applying should not wait too long. When planning the next year's calendar of events it is very useful to know when school and university holidays will fall. Therefore, we would be grateful if someone could send us this information (for Scotland & England) so that we can decide on the most helpful dates for retreats and sesshins. When writing to the Priory and a reply is anticipated a S.A.E. is always appreciated.

The monastic community sends all of you our best wishes and appreciation for your help and support. The monastery is alive and well and we hope to see many of you here over the summer months.

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# MEDITATION CLOTHING



Loose-fitting comfortable clothing is essential for correct meditation and this outfit is designed with this in mind. It is similar to that worn by lay trainees in Japanese monasteries, and consists of a kimono-type shirt which is designed to be tucked inside the wide skirt (this is appropriate for both men and women). There is also the option of wearing loose-fitting pants which are gathered at the ankles. The suit should be made out of a medium-weight washable material suitable for both summer and winter use. The colour of the suit should be DARK BEIGE.

Instructions for making meditation clothing are available from the Priory for £2.20 (£2.45 by post).

# Understanding Birth and Death

Rev. Master Jimyo Krasner, O.B.C.

The Law of Anicca, or impermanence, is one of the basic doctrines of Buddhism. All things change. All beings grow old, become ill, and die. We may be young and beautiful, perhaps become rich and famous, but in time we lose all these things. Anything we strive for in this life cannot be held on to permanently, and teachers of Buddhism have always emphasized this fact. Dōgen Zenji describes it as follows:

Changeableness offers no permanent succour. On what weeds by the roadside will the dew of our life fall? At this very minute this body is not my own. Life, which is controlled by time, never ceases even for an instant; youth vanishes for ever once it is gone. It is impossible to bring back the past when one suddenly comes face to face with changeableness, and it is impossible to look for assistance from kings, statesmen, relatives, servants, wife or children, let alone wealth and treasure. The kingdom of death must be entered by oneself alone.<sup>1</sup>

For most people the Law of Anicca is merely an idea until its truth is brought home to them in their own lives; until they come face to face with changeableness. For Shakyamuni Buddha this happened when as a young prince he left his palace for the first time and saw for himself the reality of old age, disease and death in the world outside. He then saw a holy man who was striving to transcend suffering. These Four Sights<sup>2</sup> were the fundamental reason for his subsequent religious quest. Some people go through much of their lives quite peacefully, and are then abruptly brought

face to face with the reality of impermanence by a personal tragedy such as the death of a loved one, or perhaps a close brush with death themselves. For others it may be more obvious, either because they don't seem to get what they want in life, to "make it" in the accepted worldly sense, or because they do get the things they strive for and then realise that these don't bring genuine satisfaction. The latter, plus others for whom impermanence is more obvious as a result of something in their personal makeup, are often the people who turn to religion. They are saying, some unconsciously but others quite clearly and desperately, "there's got to be something more than this."

Many people who come to spiritual training are in some way dissatisfied with life, but this is not something negative as is sometimes assumed. This common delusion was illustrated for me shortly before I became a postulant when I confided my intentions to an acquaintance at work. This young man was amazed that I should want to "shut myself away from the world" as he put it, and asked if perhaps I had had an unhappy love affair. He obviously felt that to go to a monastery was an expression of despair, of having "had it" with life. This was not the case. But at that time I was too new to training to explain that my decision to become a monk was in fact a positive step. It was not the result of despair but rather an expression of faith. Although at the time I could not formulate it clearly, it was an attempt to find the Reality which I felt sure must lie beyond life as I then knew it. This is the real purpose of Zen training. By means of meditation and its application to everyday life we can find for ourselves the Truth that the Buddha found. When we do this we find that it brings a peace and joy beyond anything the world has to offer, and we know intuitively that this is what we were always truly seeking. For those who know this for themselves no words are really necessary, and for those who have not yet experienced it fully no words are really adequate. For this reason Zen Masters traditionally have said very little on this subject, and in Buddhist literature enlightenment is

usually described obscurely or in negative terms, for example:

If any teach NIRVANA is to cease  
Say unto such they lie.

If any teach NIRVANA is to live,  
Say unto such they err;<sup>3</sup>

Also, these things are not explained in much detail to newcomers to a monastery for many people, especially Westerners, try too hard to understand with their brains and the Truth of Zen can only be experienced with one's whole being, in the same way that we can really only know what ice-cold water is by jumping into it. So, since practice is the most important thing, the newcomer to Zen training is taught to meditate and follow the monastic schedule, and birth and death are rarely mentioned. Unfortunately, the result is that many people don't get past this first step and think this is all there is to Zen training. Since in the early stages of training one may become calmer and more efficient, such people often think Zen is the same as psychotherapy but this is not the case. When we meditate we are asking to find the Truth, whether we know it or not, so those parts of ourselves which appear to separate us from It are likely to arise so that we can deal with them. This means that we have to see clearly and fully accept all our mistakes, then embrace them, learn from them and let them go, and go on. This process, which is called *Sange* in Buddhism, is essential for every trainee at some point, and if we understand the true purpose of training it can be welcomed for it is a great opportunity to deepen our commitment. But for those who are training simply to *feel better* it can be disconcerting because for a while they may find themselves feeling considerably worse. This is why it is necessary to keep the true purpose of training in one's mind at all times, for then we can accept the difficult times. It is the wholehearted acceptance of our own suffering, in the faith that there is something beyond it, which allows us to experience for ourselves that which is

beyond birth and death. This is why Sange brings *purification and salvation, true conviction and earnest endeavour.*<sup>4</sup>

To train in this way and find the Truth does not mean we cease to experience the pain and discomfort of everyday life. A Zen Master is not some kind of stone Buddha, with no emotions and no humanity. We find that which is beyond the impermanence of everyday life by fully accepting everyday life. Dōgen Zenji says:

The most important question for all Buddhists is how to understand birth and death completely. Should you be able to find the Buddha within birth and death they both vanish.<sup>5</sup>

We understand birth and death, that is impermanence, completely by fully accepting and knowing our own humanity. This can be a difficult and painful process requiring great courage and perseverance, but we all can do it, and it is by this means that we come to know that which is beyond birth and death. That which we find is in fact Real Life rather than the shadow most of us know as life. It was for this reason that Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett called her first book *Zen is Eternal Life*. It is very sad that many people, in their fear of death and the impermanence of life, spend most of their time trying to hide from both life and death. This unnecessary fear is the real reason behind many people's obsessive concern with beauty, youth, health, or physical fitness. They are terrified of either looking or growing old so they try, sometimes desperately, to put off the natural ageing processes of the body and to avoid any mention of death, much less a genuine acceptance of it. There is nothing wrong in taking care of the body, indeed quite the contrary, for it is the means we have in this life of finding the Truth; there is also nothing wrong in trying to improve the quality of one's life. But it seems to have become fashionable for care of the body to be of primary importance and one is tempted to ask what is the point of it? We cannot put off the ageing process indefinitely. In the end we all become

old and die; this is a basic fact of human existance. The reason Zen tends to steer clear of over-emphasizing physical culture, health food, alternative medicine and other currently popular pursuits, is not that these things are wrong; it is simply that they are not ultimately important. The Truth is beyond such things, and to find It we need to cut our *attachment* to these as to everything else. Finding the Truth must be our primary concern.

For the same reason Zen monks do not consider social work or other external ways of helping people to be their *primary* objective. Of course it is always good to help others in whatever way we can, but the true purpose of a monk is to find the Truth and show others how to do the same *if they wish*. This is in fact the greatest help that can be offered, for it enables the person to find real peace and joy and be free from the fear of life or death. Death is not in itself the terrible thing we are often led to believe. It concerned me greatly that in some recent TV programmes about cancer, the possibility of accepting death positively was completely ignored. Everyone involved was trying very hard to help people to be cured, but it never occurred to any of them that perhaps death was right at that time, and could be accepted positively and with dignity. Many people who work professionally with the dying have found that acceptance of death by the dying person, and his or her relatives, is of the greatest importance in enabling that person to find peace in what remains of his life, and in dying peacefully.

Buddhism teaches the understanding and acceptance of both life and death as a natural part of human existence, and it shows us how to find the Truth which is beyond them both. When one experiences this for oneself one no longer fears either life or death, but finds peace within each of them. This is not something which happens suddenly for Zen training is a gradual process. Therefore the sooner we start to train the sooner we can begin to know in our hearts what this really means. It is not some impossible ideal; any

of us can do it *within this lifetime*, and it need not take that long. The Law of Anicca itself proves this, for it is because impermanence is a law of the universe that it is possible for us to change and find for ourselves the Truth of the Buddha:

May all the Buddhas and Patriarchs, who have become enlightened, have compassion upon us, free us from the obstacle of suffering which we have inherited from our past existence, and lead us in such a way that we may share the merit that fills the universe, *for they, in the past, were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future.*

\* \* \*

#### Notes

1. *Zen is Eternal Life*, p. 155.
2. An old man, a sick man, a corpse, a dignified hermit.
3. Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 153.
4. *Zen is Eternal Life*, p. 156.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 156. (Author's italics.)

\* \* \*

# Right Effort

Rev. Teacher Chūshin Passmore, O.B.C.

Time flies like an arrow from a bow and this fact should make us train with all our might, using the same energy we would employ if our hair were to catch fire. We must guard against weakness of body, our effort being as that of the Buddha when raising his foot.<sup>1</sup>

*Dōgen Zenji.*

Faith in the ancient Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors is the foundation of Zen practice. When the Buddha raises his foot the Wheel of the Law turns throughout eternity and all beings are saved thereby. *Raising his foot* means to train; and to train in Buddhism is to raise the Mind that seeks the Way or the seed of Bodhi (enlightenment). When we begin to meditate and train the self we are already following the Mind that seeks the Way whether we are conscious of it or not. It is this mind which is prompting us to train; the still, small Voice which keeps us going during our darkest moments. It is this Mind which turns the stream of compassion within so we learn to forgive ourselves and others for past mistakes. To practise Right Effort is to train the self in everyday life so that body, speech and mind become more in harmony with the Mind that seeks the Way. To be at one with this Mind, the Buddha Nature, is to realise Nirvana here and now. *There is no need to change the present body and mind.*<sup>2</sup> We are perfectly adequate just as we are. We doubt this at first because our feelings of guilt and inadequacy run so deep; but we find the faith to continue our training. Right Effort here is to believe in the teaching and go on, regardless of worldly distractions and self accusations. This is what is meant by faith in the ancient Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It means to follow the teaching; to decide

to meditate daily and live by the Buddhist Precepts, not for any immediate reward or gratification, or to have unusual experiences, but simply to train for training's sake. The Mind that seeks the Way is at all times asking us to train. *The god of fire is calling for fire.*<sup>3</sup> The longer we refuse to answer the heavier and more desperate our suffering becomes. It is indeed a shame to constantly make excuses and go on and on wasting time. Right Effort in meditation is to listen to the heart and respond to this call. The mountain of one's karma does not disappear of itself. We have to confront it honestly and compassionately, and learn how to convert and transcend it. We do this by following the teaching of the Buddha.

The last of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths is the Noble Eightfold Path which leads directly to the complete cessation of suffering, or Nirvana. This Noble Eightfold Path is usefully divided into three groups:

Right Speech.	)	Morality	(Sīla)
Right Action.	)		
Right Livelihood.	)		
Right Effort.	)	Meditation	(Samādhi)
Right Mindfulness.	)		
Right Concentration.)			
Right Understanding.)		Wisdom	(Pañña)
Right Thoughts.	)		

You will notice that Right Effort is included in the meditation group. This is significant as it points to what kind of effort is involved. Right Effort must always be supported by Right Mindfulness or else the effort is wasted. If we face the wrong direction, no matter how energetically we walk not only do we fail to reach our destination, but we also travel further away from it. When we practise Zazen, we just sit. When we do *kinhin* (walking meditation) we just walk. But we do not walk carelessly or lazily. We are awake and alert, wholly intent on following in the footsteps

of the Buddha. The head and body are erect, "sitting up straight in the presence of the Buddhas," the hands are held comfortably against the chest. As in Zazen, the eyes are open but kept in a naturally lowered position. The breathing is quiet, smooth and unforced. We walk slowly in a clockwise circle starting on the right foot; first the heel touches the ground, then the side of the foot, and finally the toes. The left foot is gently raised as the weight of the body is transferred to the right foot, the movement always calm and unhurried with no hesitation or gap between the steps. Each foot moves forward about six inches at a time. The mind is still, concentrated and vigilant. There is just walking, nothing else matters. *Only when you concentrate your mind will Buddhas appear.*<sup>4</sup>

To do kinhin correctly takes great energy and awareness, but it is not stiff or unnatural; just as Zazen is singleminded intense sitting, kinhin is singleminded intense walking. There is much more to walking meditation than merely to stretch the legs after Zazen — it is the very life of Buddha. The Buddha does not raise his foot in anger, or despair, or in competition with others, nor in pride and complacency. The raising of his foot is an act pure and complete in itself, executed with perfect mindfulness. It is gentle but resolute neither attached to the doing of it nor its outcome. The foot is raised and the next step is taken; the simple expression of all-acceptance. As long as we can put one foot in front of the other we can walk in the footprints of the Buddha. He does not ask us to float above the ground.

It is very important to realise there is no strain or rigidity in meditation, whether walking, sitting, standing or lying down. It is a relaxed, natural and liberating activity (no matter what ugly nightmares the mind may be creating). But it takes the effort of mindfulness to achieve and maintain this state. To be mindful is to be willing to train. This willingness and openness to change is the essence of Right Effort.

An ancient verse epitomizes Zen training:

Cease from evil,  
Do only good,  
Purify the mind:  
This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.

*Good* or *merit* in Pali (*puñña*) means "whatever purifies the mind." We work on purifying and cleansing the mind of the defilements of greed, hate and delusion by Right Effort in the practice and development of the Noble Eightfold Path in daily life. This is Right Training. Through regular meditation the mind becomes quieter, more focused, and the aspects of the self stand out very clearly. It is crucial at this point not to turn away in shame or disgust but to look unflinchingly and with compassion at this frightened being we call the self. It only asks to be purified and converted to the Truth. Can we honestly refuse our help? Like charity, the work of a bodhisattva begins at home.

*Good* and *evil* in Buddhism are not moral judgements. The terms simply refer to words, actions and thoughts which either produce or alleviate suffering. Good actions (*kusala karma*) produce good effects *in the mind*; evil actions (*akusala karma*) produce evil effects *in the mind*. There is nothing outside of mind, no external judge or executioner. The potential for sublime Buddhahood or endless misery resides within. And thus the most important task for a human being is to purify the mind through Right Effort. The traditional formulation of Right Effort is a fourfold endeavour:

To discard evil which has already arisen,  
To prevent the arising of unarisen evil,  
To promote the good which has already arisen,<sup>5</sup>  
To develop the good which has not yet arisen.<sup>5</sup>

This is the mind of meditation. By coming to know and accept the self completely we begin to understand the nature of karma. With regard to bad karma we see how our past actions have caused suffering, and created

habits of body, speech and mind which perpetuate that suffering. These habits cause us to create more bad karma in the present, the inevitable consequence being more suffering and the reinforcing of these habits; it is a vicious and relentless cycle of action and reaction. Anger begets more anger, jealousy and despair feed upon themselves. If this was all there was to human existence then life would indeed be a useless and hopeless affair. But it is not and does not need to be. Out of his great compassion the Buddha teaches us how to break this cycle of suffering NOW once and for all by choosing to train the self instead of indulging in misery and fantasies. We can use suffering to penetrate and transcend suffering. By seeing and embracing our karma we find it is also the Mind that seeks the Way; nothing breathes outside of this. We meditate and receive the Precepts. But we have to choose to do this, no one is going to come along and do it for us. And this takes Right Effort; the effort to withdraw within and reflect upon the self; to sit down each day and meditate. What is ~~useless~~ is to judge oneself as unworthy of Buddhahood, and so waste this precious opportunity to rid the self of delusion and torment and come to know the Cosmic Buddha. It is we who reject Buddha by self-denigration and by placing more importance on other pursuits and worldly pastimes. Life seems most hopeless when it's upside down. Who knows when this hard won opportunity wil' come our way again? Can we afford to waste even one minute of the Buddha's life? These questions should be considered carefully.

Right Effort in dealing with others in daily life begins the process which eventually opens the door of the Treasure House. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett reminds us:

Thus every aspect of life is made into a meditation on how to think of others and purify oneself. Each one of us has something that he must cure — a secret vice, a rasping voice, heavy footfalls, unsightly

dress — anything that can offend others must be carefully attended to. Never for a moment must one consider oneself only.<sup>6</sup>

This is not to become obsessed with tidiness or to act out of fear, or simply to please others; that would be a distortion of the teaching. But it is not enough just to *feel* compassion (indeed feeling is not that important; what is important is the willingness to act compassionately). Compassion has to be expressed in our daily activities. If we eat noisily or greedily we express ingratitude for the food we eat and disrespect to those who prepared it and with whom we share it. If we are demanding and possessive in our dealings with others, perhaps from jealousy or insecurity, we cause tension and malice to gnaw away inside us, and body and mind feel only disharmony. We never know peace of mind. There are no insignificant details in training. If we go about slamming doors and talking harshly or loudly we can easily irritate other people. They may then become angry and break the Precepts. It is irresponsible to say to oneself, well, this is their karma and they'll have to deal with it; this is also a distortion of the teaching. It shows hardness of heart and a refusal to listen to the advice of Kanzeon. To understand the heart of Kanzeon we have to be willing to change. This is the ground for Buddhist study and the correct use of Right Effort. However long we have been training we must never treat others with indifference. By constantly practising Right Effort we avoid the danger of complacency. This practice does not have to be a gloomy or introverted occupation; it is simply the way to allow the stream of compassion to flow more freely. When this stream flows strongly and without restraint the mind is purified and all obstacles dissolve.

Because the Noble Eightfold Path evades the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence it is called the Middle Way. Its fulfilment leads to lasting spiritual freedom and unshakeable joy. This is the *easy* training of the Buddhas and Ancestors. Right Effort becomes no-effort; no-effort is non-attachment and all-acceptance.

We realise this through the practise of Right Effort and Right Mindfulness. To actualise this *easy* training is to be enlightened.

"He who is released from all suffering and is beyond the world is called the Sangha Treasure;"— he for whom no longer desires burn, wherein wants and cravings no longer exist; he who gets up in the morning and goes to sleep at night, eats when he is hungry, sleeps when he is tired, is satisfied with that which he is given and does not ask for more than he can absolutely use in the immediate now. When someone is converted to the Three Treasures thus, he can have the Precepts of the Buddhas absolutely.<sup>7</sup>

#### Notes

1. *Zen is Eternal Life* p. 123.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
5. See Nārada Maha Thera, *The Buddha and His Teachings* 4th edn (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1980) pp. 319-332. A concise but comprehensive version of this work is Nārada Thera, *A Manual of Buddhism* (Kuala Lumpur: The Buddhist Missionary Society, 1971).
6. *Zen is Eternal Life*, p. 41. The rest of this chapter "The Necessity of Understanding the Heart of Kanzeon," should be studied in great detail.
7. Keizan Zenji, *Kyojūkaimon*, with commentary by Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett (Shasta Abbey Press, 1977), p. 5.

\* \* \*

## NEWS



The Raising of the Beam.

*Building Progress.* Despite the bad weather work on the new building is going ahead. A major job was the installation of a 30ft, 12001b. steel beam (see photo) to support the floor of the Zendō over the now much larger dining area. Corrective work on some of the stonework has been necessary, and this is well in hand. Two new windows are being put in the dining area giving a spectacular view up the valley. We have enough money to keep on working but we need about another £10,000 to be able to put up the roof. We have just bought some

scaffolding, an expensive but necessary item not only for this building but for future ones as well. People are still cordially invited to come to the Priory either to help on the building itself, or with our many other outstanding projects.

Jūkai 1983. The Jūkai sesshin took place on April 1 - 7. The reading of the *Kyojūkaimon* on April 2 was followed the next afternoon by *Lay Ordination*. This year thirteen lay people received the Precepts and formally became Buddhists: Finin Airton, Brigitte Baumgardt, Jon Clarkson, George Deas, Bart Delfosse, Clive Ellis, Andy Finch, Tony Head, Harry Melling, Charles Stacey Platt, Hugh Tynan, Ton Visser, and Keith Williams. We send our best wishes to these new ancestors of Shakyamuni Buddha and urge them to continue the work which has begun. On the evening of April 6 we celebrated the last great ceremony of Jūkai, *Recognition*. The word *recognition* can mean either "the fact of perceiving that some thing or person is the same as one previously known," or "the fact of apprehending a thing as having a certain character or belonging to a certain class." At this joyful ceremony the monks process three times around the assembled lay congregation chanting:

Buddha recognizes Buddha and Buddha bows to Buddha.  
Go around Mount Sumeru; go around the Buddha.

All the temple bells are rung, the dawn drum is beaten and conch shells sounded. It is a true recognition that we all are indeed the children of Buddha. And the thunder of the Buddha Dharma dispels any doubts we may have about this.

*Monastic Events.* On Wednesday March 23 1983, Rev. Teacher Jigen Bartley continued her *Kessei* ceremonies with *Haiyaku* (Officers' Installation Ceremony) and *Jōdō* (Heavenly Hall Ceremony). Rev. Master Daishin was the examiner, with Rev. Master Jimyo as lecturer, and Rev. Teachers Chūshin and Saidō as assistants. The ceremonies were performed with great faith and reverence; we congratulate Rev. Teacher Jigen and wish her well in the future.

On April 24 Liz Abbie from Edinburgh entered the monastery as a postulant. On May 6 Guy Cluett from Mansfield was ordained by Rev. Master Daishin and received the name Hōun Edmund which means *Guardian of the Treasure of the Dharma Cloud*; we are pleased to welcome Liz to the monastic community and congratulate Edmund on taking this next step in his training.

*Outside Retreats.* Priests from Throssel Hole Priory have recently conducted retreats in Newcastle; Dundalk, Ireland; and Holland. The retreat in Dundalk at the end of April was at Mount St Oliver, an Institute of Religious Education. Twenty-five people took part and it was successfully run as a full Sōtō Zen retreat even though held at a Catholic centre. The Holland retreat was in Arnhem and also well attended. Another retreat led by a priest from the Priory is planned for later this year; beginners will be welcome at this retreat. Following a one-day retreat in Newcastle the Tyneside meditation group has asked if a priest could attend their meetings once a month. We are happy to do this and the priest will be giving meditation instruction to new people at the start of the evening. Please write for further details.

*Donations.* Over the last few months we have received generous donations of ceramic vases and bowls, books and a map; seeds, plants and a fan heater; four ceremonial torches, a "stroboscopic timing lamp;" the kitchen was given an electric mixer and chopping boards; tea, cake, bread, rice, lemonade and honey; chocolate, fruit and nuts. A coffee morning and bring-and-buy sale was organized by the Birmingham meditation group, and the proceeds donated to the Priory. This is a very thoughtful and practical way of helping the monastery; other groups may wish to do the same. Please accept our sincere gratitude for all these offerings.

*Begging Bowl.* The Priory could well use a small office-desk and an angle-poise lamp; work gloves of all kinds, a builder's level (theodolite) and wood-turning tools; padded envelopes, stick-on address labels, cardboard

mailing tubes; the kitchen would appreciate 21b. bread tins, and baking sheets.

Garden. After a slow start owing to the wettest spring since records began, the garden is now doing well; visitors to the Priory can expect to enjoy fresh garden vegetables this summer. We have also planted a lawn in front of the house (what was the "top vegetable garden") and dug a strawberry and rhubarb bed in the fruit garden. Since our soil is heavy clay, and needs a lot of feeding, donations of sand, potting compost, fertilizer etc.. are always welcome; garden tools and leftover seeds, for example, are also useful. In particular, the garden needs rhubarb plants, and strawberry plants or runners for planting in August.

\* \* \*

To truly study the Way is to try to penetrate it, and, in order to do this one must forget even the slightest trace of enlightenment.

One who would train in Buddhism must first believe completely therein and in order to do so, one must believe that one has already found the Way, never having been lost, deluded, upside down, increasing, decreasing or mistaken in the first place.

One must train oneself thus, believing thus, in order to make the Way clear; this is the ground for Buddhist study.

Dōgen Zenji

# BOOKS AND BUDDHIST SUPPLIES

## FREE GIFT:

A calligraphed quotation from the *Kyojūkaimon* will be sent with every order over £10.00 received before September 15 1983.

## NEW ITEMS:

*Meditation Clothing Instructions:* Detailed instructions for making shirt, skirt and trousers. £2.45.

*Buddha Statues:* Made of fibreglass resin with a metallic finish. Various sizes available:

2½" - £3.90, 4½" - £7.50, 5½" - £10.10.

*Greeting Cards:* The 1000-armed Kanzeon card will not be available until October, but we have the following: Shakyamuni Buddha, Four-armed Kanzeon, Tara, Manjusri. 50p each.

*Laurel's Kitchen:* New edition, paperback. £8.75.

*Ship and Three Drums Pins:* Handcrafted of sterling silver by the monks of Shasta Abbey. £8.00.

*Shushōgi:* Two tape set of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's lectures. £9.15.

*Available July - August: Morning Star Incense;* Rose, Sandalwood or Jasmine - each packet is gift-boxed.

Probable cost: 85p a packet, £7.50 a box of 10 packets.

## PLEASE NOTE:

Many other items are obtainable from Shasta Abbey whose catalogue we sell here, price £1.00. However, you may have to pay as much as 25% customs charges on the cost of any goods you order.

## PRICE INCREASES:

We have had to increase many of our prices owing to the fall of sterling against the dollar, plus increased postage costs. Before ordering please write for a new price list, or add the following amounts and we will refund any excess: For each item under £3.00 add 35p; £3.00 - £7.00 add 75p; over £7.00 add £1.00.

## DISCONTINUED ITEMS:

Shasta Abbey Psalter, Book of Ceremonies, and Becoming a Buddhist - all out of print.

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